



Hunt the Saxons 2005

Test Pit report for Test Pit 17 51 Tanners St, Faversham.

Grid Reference TR 01126 61389

1. Introduction

51 Tanners St lies on the west side of the street, on a plot bordering the West Brook. The house, constructed of red brick with a tiled roof, lies in the middle of a terrace of 3 properties, built around 1770 for officials of the Royal Gunpowder Factory¹: the Kings Mill was situated nearby on the other side of the West Brook. This property features on all of the historical maps available to the author at the time of writing, the earliest being Jacob's map of 1774.²

Although there is a sharp drop to the stream at the bottom of the garden, this is assumed to be due to a combination of fall in water level and accumulation of occupational debris in the garden. During the Saxon period this plot was probably a marshy area at the foot of the bank overlooking the stream.³

2. Location of pit

The pit was placed centrally in the lawn area, midway between house and stream. The lawn area was flat, with no obvious disturbances. Maps had shown no standing buildings in this area but a recent map (1980s) does show a mysterious boundary enclosing the northern part of the garden (see **Fig 1**).

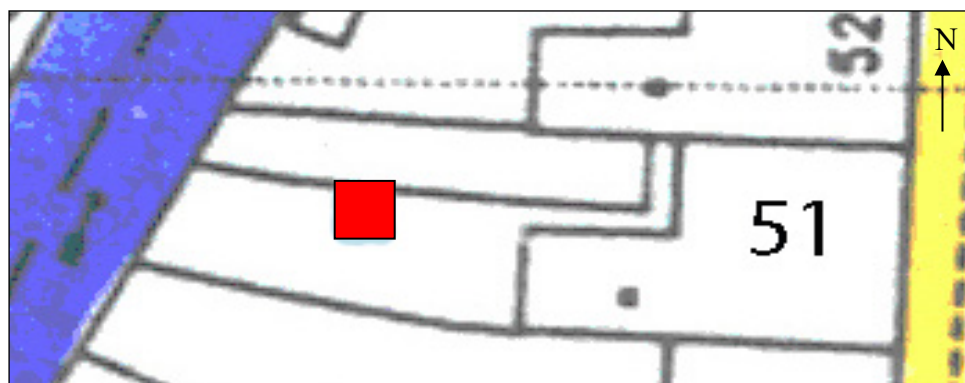


Fig 1: Location of Test Pit 17 on a 1980s map.

¹ Swaine, A. 1969 *Faversham Conserved* Maidstone: KCC p116

² Jacob, E. 1974 *History of Faversham* Faversham Society Publication, Sheerness: Cassell

³ Kent Historic Towns Survey, 2003 *Faversham: Archaeological Assessment Document*, Map 2

3. The procedures

A one metre square was pegged out using the planning square and the area delineated marked with string. The position of the square was recorded by measuring to mapped corners of the house. Turf was removed carefully from the square, rolled and set aside in plastic bags. The pit was then excavated in 30cm spits (layers), each spit being trowelled out in 5cm layers. Because a major feature was encountered at a depth of 30cm, only around half of Spits 2 and 3 were removed, and Spit 4 was considered inaccessible. All excavated soil was sieved meticulously, and the spoil heap scanned using a metal detector. Finds were set aside for each spit, with special finds being given three dimensional coordinates to pinpoint the exact find spot. Finally, the spoil was put back in, tamped down, watered and the turf replaced.

4. The findings

The topmost layer was friable and ash-laden, with a great variety of artefacts including small pottery sherds, nails, glass fragments and small pieces of brick and tile. By the bottom of Spit 1, however, a brick feature had begun to emerge on the northern side of the pit. This feature was not disturbed and excavation continued in the southern half of the pit. By the 45cm level the brick feature was clearly revealed as substantial wall foundation or path.

Fig 2: Brick feature in TP 17.



This feature consisted of two parallel rows of bricks with an infill of brick rubble, giving a total width of 40-50cm and ran east / west, from the house towards the stream. The feature was one course deep and heavily mortared.

In the section still being excavated, the deposit was similar to that encountered in spit 1, until a layer of brick and tile was encountered at 45cm down (see **Fig 2**). This layer continued down to the limit of excavation and contained a number of voids as well as some important pottery finds and large quantities of animal bone and shells. This brick and tile layer extended beneath the brick feature (**Fig 3**).

Spit 2 contained an exceptionally large amount of shells – oyster, whelk, cockle, mussel and an abundance of winkles. Spits 2 and 3 also contained substantial amounts of animal bone, dominated by

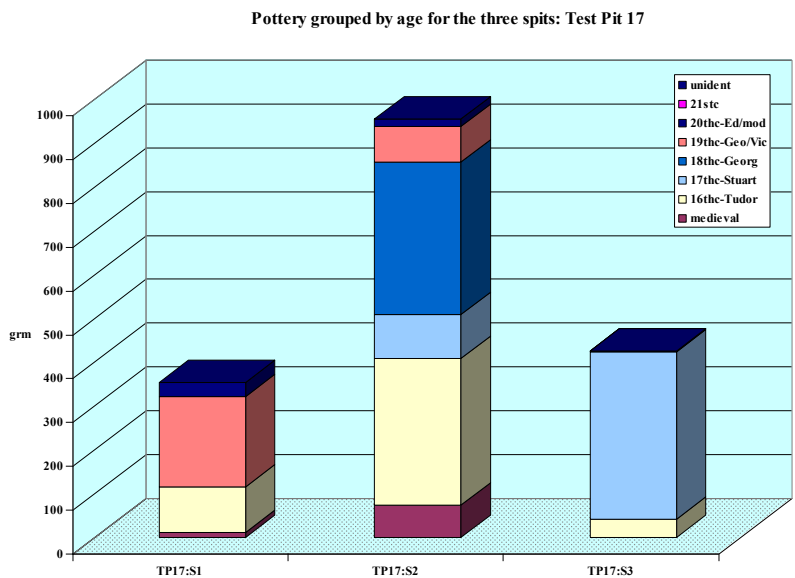
lower leg bones from mature cattle but also including fragments of cow pelvis and a skull fragment with horn attached. The bones had been cut by a heavy cleaver.

Fig 3: Brick feature laid on top of brick/tile demolition layer.



The pottery from Test Pit 17 is particularly interesting.

Fig 4: Pottery grouped by age for Test Pit 17.



Unlike the other 2005 Test Pits, Test Pit 17 had relatively little 19th century pottery. In Spits 2 and 3, 16th - 18th century pottery is dominant. Spit 2 yielded a near complete orange plate decorated with trailed yellow slip and in Spit 3, substantial pieces of Early English Delft ware were found, one with the classic Bird on a Rock design⁴ and another with a jaunty mermaid. A base fragment decorated in yellow slip in a rooster design has been identified as a late 16th century Dutch import⁵ (**Fig 6**). Finally, in Spit 2, seven abraded sherds of medieval Tyler Hill pottery were found, dated to c AD 1400-1500.

⁴ Black, J 2001 *British Tin-Glazed Earthenware* Princes Risborough: Shire Publications p 23

⁵ Draper, J. 2001 *Post Medieval Pottery* Princes Risborough: Shire Publications p 15

Fig 6: 16th and 17th century pottery from Spit 3.



5. Interpretation

The brick feature coincides with the short-lived garden boundary shown only on the 1970s map but seems far too substantial for such a structure. As this boundary existed within living memory, enquiries need to be made about its nature. For the meantime, the feature looks more like a brick pathway, perhaps made from the demolition materials which underlie it. This path could have been constructed at the same time as the present house. The dimensions of these bricks (222 x 100 x 50mm) suggest an earlier date than the present house, and given that the pottery associated with the demolition layer is mostly 16th - 17th century, it would seem that the materials represent an earlier, demolished house which occupied the plot prior to 1770. The completeness of the pots along with their relative good quality implies that the demolition took place under abrupt circumstances, with the discard of once-valued possessions.

6. Final comments

Test Pit 17 is very intriguing, and will benefit from further detailed examination in late 2006 when the animal bone and brick / tile material will be more fully analysed. There are hints of an industrial function preceding the building of 'smart' properties for the Gunpowder Works employees, with a degree of prosperity and contacts abroad. Further documentary research may well shed light on this.

7. Acknowledgments

Many thanks to Tiffany Henderson and her family for permission to dig in this garden and for their great and unfailing hospitality and interest. We especially appreciated help with the cataloguing and dating of the clay pipe finds.



Small Finds



SF37



SF38



SF39



SF43



SF56



SF61



SF68



SF69

Small Finds Details.

- SF37: Copper Coin (unidentifiable). Somewhat corroded, raised rim (like 40s / 50s 3D bit). Uneven smooth edge. Quite bent, distorted. Unidentifiable.
- SF38: Copper Alloy Coin (unidentifiable). Heavily corroded on one side. Other side seems smooth ie. without design. Very green.
- SF39: Lead Token. Obverse has square cross with 4 pellets in 1 quadrant, 1 in adjacent quadrant. Reverse corroded, with a few hints of design. Flattened-off circle across 2 quadrants - looks like clipping rather than wear. Main period for lead cross & pellet is 15th century. Could be rather earlier or a bit later.
- SF43: Lead Token. Obverse has square cross with 4 pellets in 1 quadrant, 1 in adjacent quadrant. Reverse corroded, with a few hints of design. Flattened-off circle across 2 quadrants - looks like clipping rather than wear. Main period for lead cross & pellet is 15th century. Could be rather earlier or a bit later.
- SF56: Thimble (part). Fragment of a copper-alloy thimble (top-end).
- SF61: Pendant. Heavily corroded elongated pendant with link for a chain.
- SF68: Spoon Bowl. Bowl of spoon, part of a folding spoon with hinge present at bowl / stem junction. Rivet head on one side of hinge. Lettering partly decipherable across inside of bowl - see diagram. The name KEPLER starts at least two lines, and the word LIVER occurs once. Pharmaceutical spoon? Post - med. Probably late 19th / early 20th.
- SF69: Buckle. CuA buckle with Fe contamination. Sub rectangular, with rounded corners. No signs of bar ever being present. Slightly curved in profile. Late 18th / early 19th cent shoe buckle, curved to fit the foot.